

**HOTTING UP**  
**Roger Matthews**

There is no shortage of significant paperwork to pack in your suitcase and read on your summer holidays this year – if, indeed, given the financial climate, you are taking any. Hard on the heels of HTM 01-05 comes the *Review of NHS Dental Services in England*, and I have taken a copy off my (extensive) reading pile to look through.

There are certainly sensible suggestions here to address the “main factor of dissatisfaction” – namely the current contract. In particular, the recommendation that this time there will be “no sudden changes” and careful modelling of new contractual approaches is salutary.

A “patient gateway” to NHS services through an “initial oral health assessment” is proposed as a way to ensure that prevention is the primary aim of dental care is also, most would agree, essential. As is the comment that the current method of remuneration is adversely, in some cases, affecting treatment decisions.

And “clinical pathways” to ensure that evidence-based care is promoted, and treatment which is clinically appropriate for each patient is provided. Excellent.

Better IT services and availability – an “effective information infrastructure” will ensure that data is collected and shared. This will also, of course enable the “monitoring of clinical quality”. Great.

PCTs will have correctly devolved funding to ensure that both independent contractors and salaried services can function to satisfy local needs, as determined by individual assessments. Absolutely.

Development of services using the skills of the entire dental team, and also to utilise the skills of specialist dentists is also good sense, both professionally and financially. Another excellent point.

In short, patients will have much better information on the quality and availability they can expect from NHS dental services. That's what everyone's been saying.

But hang on a minute, I've just realised that in my haste I've picked up the wrong document. This one's called *Options for Change* and it's dated August 2002.

Memo to self – cull reading pile more often. And reflect on how much (or how little) has changed in seven years.

**Notes to Editors:**

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Roger joined Denplan in 1995 having spent 20 years working in general dental practice and as a dento-legal advisor for the Medical Defence Union. He oversees dental advice to the company and its links with professional bodies, and is responsible for Denplan's professional services.